

Thoughts and Memories

by arian

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Summary: Squall has an idea that could give Laguna the chance to save Raine

1. Default Chapter Title

> <meta name="ProgId"> Thoughts and Memories

Thoughts and Memories.

By Arian

This story occurs more or less after the events of FFVIII. It does contain spoilers.

There are a couple of flaws in this (and now you're all going to look for them, aren't you?)

but they are there for the benefit of the story. Go easy on me, it's my first fic!

Laguna Loire walked slowly up the hill, unusually subdued. It had been many years since he had last ventured up here and everything was exactly as he remembered.

The high hill in the town of Winhill was as serene as ever. The wind blew gently through the short grass and the flowers growing in clumps.

Raising his eyes, he saw the marble plinth that marked the end of this journey. This was the sole reason for his return to the tiny village. Raine had been dead for 17 years but after the lasting impression she had left on him, it was hard to stop thinking about her.

Her gravestone on top the hill was simply marked with her name, Raine Loire. Laguna cursed himself silently. It should say so much more!

She had been so much and all the stone could tell anyone was her name, but he had not been here when she was buried, nor did he have the heart to disturb her sleep to add words that could offer no comfort.

He let his mind drift back through the years. It was a few days after Kiros had found him here, tucked away in a village far from anywhere. Kiros had left to find Ward and Laguna had much to think about. Kiros had questioned his ambition to be a journalist and now he found himself questioning not just his ambition but his whole life.

In the evening, Laguna had climbed this same hill to look at the stars and contemplate the future. Earlier, he had made a decision and had visited a silversmith he knew.

Hearing soft footsteps behind him, he spun round, nervously. Raine had followed him up here.

"What's the matter?" she had asked, seeing the worried look on his face.

> "I'm OK," he reassured her "It's nothing."<o:p><o:p>

He remembered her frown then, not believing a word he had said. His courage had faltered and he had turned and started to walk away.

Hearing her steps behind as she made to follow him, he summoned the last of his courage and turned quickly to take Raines hand.

"Marry me, Raine?" he pleaded quietly, sliding the silver ring onto her finger.

Not answering, she stared at the ring with a look of complete incredulity on her face. Then, smiling, she held up her hand, as if to show him. Smiling with relief, Laguna mirrored her gesture to show her the matching ring.

Raine had flung her arms round him then and as he remembered the light in her blue eyes and the smell of her hair, he heard a voice call his name.

Pushing back the memories, Laguna turned to see Ellone waving to him. Managing a half-hearted smile, he waved back. Seeing Ward and Kiros further behind Ellone he walked back to them. Time to go now, he thought to himself. It still hurt too much to be here for any length of time.

Two days later in Esthar, Laguna sat in the Presidential Palace, lost in thought. Kiros walked in, followed closely by Ward.

"Alright Laguna, what the hell's the matter with you at the moment?"

"Me? What's with you guys, you mean! I haven't had a minute to myself! If it's not Odine rambling on about some new project, it's you two bothering me."

"No, it is you Laguna, and I'm speaking for both of us when I say you've changed."

Ward nodded.

"You sit here, always thinking or daydreaming. You do have a country to run, you know." Kiros continued. "For years, you've managed to get on with your life after what happened, so why now?"

"The country can run itself. It managed fine when I was at Lunar Base."

Kiros ignored him. "Why Raine? Why now?"

Laguna gave up. "It's Squall. He..."

"He looks like her, so he reminds you of her, right?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry, but he's just stirring up old thoughts, you know?"

Ward looked at Kiros for a moment and something passed between them.

"We understand. We really do. Ward thinks you should go talk to Squall about it. And Ellone too. The three of you have a lot to talk about. I know both of you are uneasy about the father-son thing but you should talk out your memories with them." Kiros chuckled at the memory of Squall's face when Laguna had told him.

"Rinoa will help you. She has Squall wrapped round her little finger. She seems really good at that, like her mother was." Kiros commented.

"You knew her mother?"

"Not as well as you did, my friend. We never did meet up with Julia again."

Laguna stared at Kiros, his green eyes wide with amazement.

"So Squall and Rinoaâ€¦ My son and Julia's daughter?"

Kiros nodded, smiling. "You know there's almost a kind of poetic justice to that. Oh, Ward says Squall is Raine's son as well, remember?"

"Remember? Like I could forget!"

"So you're gonna go see them?"

"Definitely!"

The door opened and Ellone stepped in.

"Uncle Laguna?" she asked.

"It's OK, Ellone. He's agreed to see sense for a while." Kiros told her.

"C'mon Elle! We're gonna pay Squall a visit."

The Garden hovered near Balamb. They were on their way up to the mountains, to Trabia Garden. Selphie was adamant about helping fix it and Squall supposed she was right. It had been their fault Trabia was blown up so the least they could do was help repair it.

They had stopped at Balamb partly at Zell's insistence he wanted to see his mum again and partly because Squall had heard Seifer was here. After a long talk, without gunblades, they had managed to make some sense of all that had happened. They would never really be friends but there would be an end to the fighting. There had to be. Squall was the leader in Garden and had decided Seifer should be able to take the SeeD exam again, if he wanted to. He was good, Squall had to admit and Squall was never one to let personal feelings get in the way of professional judgement. Seifer was to retake the exam tomorrow, with Fujin and Raijin.

Squall heard the door open. He knew who it was before he turned around.

"Rinoa, I really do have stuff to think about."

"Can't you relax, just for a minute?" Rinoa asked, wrapping her arms round his waist.

"They do expect me to do a little work."

"Just tell them you're my knight and I need you with me always. Just in case I decide to take over the world or something." She laughed.

"Don't even joke about it." The time when Rinoa was possessed was still painful to him.

"Then relax, take a few minutes off. If you don't I might have to do some sorcery."

"You wouldn't." Squall laughed.

Rinoa's eyes rested on a pile of papers on the desk. Screwing her face up in concentration, she pointed a finger and the papers went up in flames.

"Rinoa!" Squall cried in consternation.

Laughing, she waved a hand and the fire vanished, leaving the paper undamaged.

"C'mon Squall. Take a break. Besides, Laguna and Ellone are here to see you."

Squall groaned quietly and let her drag him from the room.

2. Default Chapter Title

> <meta name="ProgId"> Thoughts and Memories

Thoughts and Memories.

By Arian

Part two

"So," Rinoa smiled brightly, "what can we do for you?"

Sat in the cafeteria, Laguna looked across the table at Squall.

"This sounds a little strange," he said, scratching his head, "but I just need you to listen."

"What do you mean? Why?" Squall asked bluntly.

"I have memories of Raine. I need to talk them out or something. Everyone seems to think it's best if I talk to you and Elle."

"So talk." Squall shrugged indifferently.

Rinoa nudged Squall sharply and hissed at him to say something nice or say nothing at all.

Ellone and Rinoa listened attentively as Laguna started to relate memories of Raine and Winhill but Squall found his mind wandering as it often did when he was bored. These stories may be about his parents but he just couldn't relate to these people. He had not had the chance to get to know Raine and he didn't particularly feel like he wanted to get to know Laguna.

_ He doesn't need to talk,_ Squall thought, _talking doesn't solve anything. Laguna's problem stems from not being there for Raine whenâ€|when I was born._

"Are you listening, Squall?" Rinoa whispered "You'd better be, 'cause this is really hurting him, to talk like this."

_ It's not like I don't already know all this. I kind of lived through some of it when Sis sent me back. _Squall's eyes widened.

"That's it!" he yelled.

"What?" Laguna asked bemused.

"Squall!" Rinoa threatened.

"No, it could be the answer. Talking won't work, but what if Sissis could send you back? Back to when Raine died. Thenâ€|then she wouldn't be alone."

Ellone stood up.

"I'm sorry, Uncle Laguna. It won't work. You can't change the past."

"You can try. You can let him go back, not to change the past, but just to see her."

"Sis, I think we all need this. Need to know Raine was not

alone."

"Please, Elle. I helped you so many times. Will you help me?" Laguna asked.

"OK, I'll do it. No promises. I can only try. But first, Rinoa, could I speak to you for a moment?"

Rinoa nodded and they walked over to the far corner of the cafeteria.

"I don't know what you think but I believe both of them, and me, need to witness this. I can only send Uncle Laguna back. I dare not send Squall back to see his own birth, besides, Raine wouldn't recognise him." Ellone paused and looked straight at Rinoa.

"I think Odine might be able to rig something up so you could all watch on a monitor, but I don't think Uncle Laguna would approve of us flocking round to watch him say goodbye to his wife."

"You need it kept secret? No problem. He'll never know, just follow my lead." Rinoa told her, strolling back to the table.

"What was all that about?" Squall demanded.

"Nothing. Just girl talk." Rinoa said, drawing imaginary pictures with her toe.

"I think that means we're not to ask any questions." Laguna laughed.

"You got it." Rinoa told him. She leaned down towards Squall. "I think you were saying earlier you had a lot of "stuff" to do?"

"But I thought Sisâ€|" Squall didn't get the chance to finish the sentence before Rinoa cut in smoothly.

"Ellone needs to rest first and I need to talk to some people. We'll do it tomorrow. You're both welcome to stay here 'til then, if Esthar can manage without you." She said formally, turning to Laguna and Ellone, who smiled at Rinoa playing hostess.

"Esthar does better without me than it does when I'm there." Laguna told her. "I think it could be my overwhelming presence distracting them."

Squall laughed. "Yeah, right."

Laguna grinned back at him.

Rinoa met up with Ellone early the next morning.

"Does anyone know you're here?" Rinoa asked, cautiously, as they lurked in the corridor.

"No, I don't think so. Why?"

"It's more fun this way!" Rinoa laughed. "Squall was still sleeping

when I left. He always looks so sweet when he sleeps." She blushed slightly and it was Ellone's turn to laugh.

"So what did you plot?" Ellone asked.

"Well, Odine has built the Junction Machine Ellone." She paused. "Kind of cool to have something named after you. Anyway, if we say we're going to use this occasion as an opportunity to try out this new machine, Odine says he can easily set up a monitor screen for us to watch."

"Won't Uncle Laguna wonder why I'm not sending him back?"

"Probably, but I think we can count on Odine to make enough fuss about his new machine to distract Laguna."

"You don't think that much of him, do you?" Ellone asked carefully.
"You share Squall's opinion of Laguna."

"I understand how Squall feels through my own experience." Rinoa thought for a moment. "I don't know enough to really share Squall's opinion."

"That's right. You don't." Ellone said quietly and made to walk away.

"Ellone, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you."

Ellone stopped and without turning to face Rinoa, she began to speak.

"I was so small when my parents died, I don't have any real memories of them. The first thing I remember is playing in Raine's house. She looked after me and we were content. Then Laguna turned up and changed everything. Raine may not always have seemed it but she was happier and so was I. I had a proper family again and I knew that either of them would do anything for me."

"Then, one morning when Uncle Laguna had already gone on patrol with Kiros, Esthar soldiers took me away. I was sat outside waiting for them to return and when I saw the soldiers I can remember thinking that Raine would be mad at me. It happened so quick there was nothing she could do. Uncle Laguna travelled the world to rescue me. That's why I get mad at Squall."

"What do you mean?"

"If Laguna would do all this for me, what do you suppose he'd do for his son? If Squall asked him to do something, anything, he'd do it. In return Squall can't even bring himself to like Laguna."

"It is getting better, Ellone. Squall just needs time to adjust and maybe this plot of ours will help."

Ellone smiled and seemed to return to her normal, more reticent self.

"I hope so."

They had all gathered in Odine's laboratory in Esthar. From Garden, Squall had brought Rinoa, Quistis, Selphie and Irvine. Zell was still visiting his mum in Balamb, so Squall wouldn't have to worry about any tactless remarks that might offend. He hadn't really wanted to bring Selphie and Irvine but you couldn't keep Selphie away from anything to do with "Sir Laguna" and there was no way she was about to let Irvine spend a few days alone with the female students of Garden.

"Remember your promise, Selphie." Squall heard Rinoa saying. "Nothing goes on your Garden festival committee page about this."

"Yeah, I know." Selphie groaned. "But it'd be such a cool story!"

"You promised." Rinoa warned.

_ Why was Rinoa taking all this so seriously? Not like her at all,_ Squall thought to himself. _All that happens when Sis sends people back is they pass out, so why did she insist we should all be here?
—

He knew Rinoa had changed. She was no longer worried about belonging with their little group because she knew that she did. Consequently, she did occasionally act like _she_ was the SeeD commander but Squall knew none of them wanted to change her. She was Rinoa.

A short while later, Ellone entered the room followed closely by Odine and Laguna who were arguing loudly.

"Ze only possible time to try ze machine iz now. You'll never let me use it after zis."

"Moving through time too much is dangerous. What if you change something in the past that changes the present? Anything could happen."

"Then let me use it now."

"There's no need. Elle can send me back."

"But then ze machine vill never be used."

"I am quite tired." Ellone put in. "Using the machine would be safe and I'd be able to bring you back quickly if anything went wrong."

"If you're sure, Elle. But I trust you better than a machine."

"I know." She smiled. "But it won't hurt to try it."

"Stand on ze cross on ze floor. Ze machine does ze rest." Odine eagerly instructed.

Laguna nodded reluctantly and stepped over to the cross. Pushing his dark hair away from his eyes, he waved to Ellone.

"Good luck." Squall called and Rinoa noted the surprise on Ellone's

face.

"It'll be fine, you'll see!" Selphie yelled. "Love, friendship and courage, whoo-hoo!"

Laguna laughed at his own words and turned to face Odine and his machine.

"There may be a short period of nothingness before you reach your destination." Odine warned, pressing a series of buttons.

A pulsating, green glow emanated from the machine and enveloped Laguna until they could no longer see him. As the green mist dispersed they could see no trace of Esthar's president.

"Heeeeey! He's gone!" Selphie cried out in surprise.

"When we went into the past, our bodies were still here in this time. Only our consciousness was sent back." Quistis commented. "If Laguna was rescuing Ellone when Raine died, it would be pointless to send him into his past self and sending him into someone else wouldn't work terribly well. The machine must have sent all of him back."

"Exactly!" said Odine. "Now look at ze screen. We should begin to get something."

"Where are Ward and Kiros?" Squall asked suddenly.

"They're taking care of things in the city. They're gonna make sure no one disturbs us as much as they can." Ellone answered quietly as they gathered round a monitor.

"It's kinda like watching TV." said Irvine.

"I just hope Sir Laguna is OK." Selphie told him, adjusting her yellow dress.

"That's real stupid, Sefie. Of course he's not OK. It's not fun watching someone you love die." Irvine often had these sudden bursts of seriousness but they still surprised Selphie. He just never seemed a serious kinda guy.

The chatter stopped as a picture formed on the screen. Squall stared at Rinoa.

"This is what you were up to then? We're gonna watch_?!"

Rinoa looked innocently up at him. "Oh, did we forget to tell you?"

"I'm leaving." Squall told her bluntly. He hated these reminders of mortality. They reminded him of just how much he had to lose. His friends may have tried to change some parts of him but that fear of loss was still something he feared and hated. He could accept that he had no control over what would happen but he could not forget what he had felt when he thought he had lost Rinoa and he had no wish to be reminded of it by watching Raine die. He still thought of her as Raine. It was hard for him to recognise her as his mother. He never got the chance to know her.

As he tried to leave Rinoa grabbed his arm and hauled him back.

"No Squall. We planned this for you and him and Elle. You're not walking out on this. You need this Squall. Perhaps we all do."

Squall sighed but stayed where he was, watching the screen. The houses and trees of Winhill began to appear and stood in the centre of the town square was Laguna.

"I bet he's nervous. Probably scared too. I know I would be." Rinoa said quietly reaching down to take Squall's hand. The others agreed with her, but Squall and Ellone were silent, their eyes intent on the screen.

3. Default Chapter Title

> <meta name="ProgId"> Thoughts and Memories

Thoughts and Memories.

By Arian

Part 3

Laguna looked about as Winhill materialised around him. Hard to tell if this was the right time, Winhill never really changed.

As he walked the short distance to the pub, he happened to glance down at his hands. They were different, he noticed. Odine must have made him younger by sending him here. Good thing too, he mused, or Raine would be very surprised.

He still didn't know what he would do or say. He didn't feel at all prepared for this but he hoped, in spite of all Elle had said, that just maybe there was a chance he could change what had happened.

The pub was closed which was unusual for this time of day â€“ the sun was only beginning to set. The door was not locked so Laguna tentatively stepped over the threshold.

"Who's there?" called out a voice he had not heard for too many years.

"It's me, Raine." His voice faltered. "I'm back."

"Laguna? I'm upstairs."

Climbing the stairs, Laguna hoped she was still the same as he remembered, even if she was mad at him, just so long as she had not changed.

"So where's Elle?" Raine asked. "Is she alright?"

Laguna turned and saw Raine lying on her back on the couch, her hands resting on her swollen abdomen.

"Elle's fine." He replied, swallowing a lump in his throat. He had

never believed he would get this second chance and the guilt he felt for staying in Esthar when he should have been here with the person he loved most in all the world resurfaced.

He quickly fabricated a story.

"She won't be back for another week or so. She's travelling with Ward and Kiros. I raced on ahead to see you." He hoped she wouldn't guess that it was all completely fictional and he hadn't a clue where Ellone was at this exact point in time. Realising he was speaking too fast, he stopped.

"So, how are you?" he asked cautiously.

"I'm fine." She smiled, beckoning him over to her side. Kneeling by the couch, Laguna wrapped his arms round her. *Why did I stay away so long? Why didn't I come back sooner?*

"I've missed you so much."

"I missed you too." She replied, puzzled by the strange emphasis he put on the words. Reaching up, she held his head down close to hers and he felt her stifle a cough. Standing, Laguna smiled sadly down at her.

"Raine, you're not OK. What's the matter?"

"Nothing! I really am fine." She held up her arms, hoping he'd take the hint and change the subject.

Taking her hands carefully in his own, Laguna persisted.

"You have a cough, don't you? And you seem lighter than usual."

"Don't fret so, Laguna. It's just the tail end of a fever that's been going round the village. I'm better now."

"That's all?"

"Yes, it truly is."

Laguna turned and walked to the table, standing silent for a moment. The lamp, despite its proximity, was unable to reach most of his face, shielded as it was by his hair.

Unable to read his expression, Raine worried. This was so unlike the Laguna she knew. How could one journey have changed him so much? Perhaps it's just worry, first over Elle, then me, she told herself. Who knows what he's seen on his travels?

Struggling to stand, she walked uneasily over to him, trying to keep her balance and hoping with every step that she would soon be able to carry their baby in her arms, not her stomach.

"I feel like a whale." She muttered trying to lift Laguna's dark mood.

"You're beautiful." He whispered, his green eyes shining. "You truly are more beautiful than words."

Raine laughed uneasily.

"I suppose that's a compliment coming from a writer."

"I meant it."

"I know, but there are prettier people than me."

"Pretty is just appearance. You're the most beautiful person I've met."

Grateful for such a sincere compliment when she felt so clumsy, Raine leaned into Laguna, as much as her condition would allow, and wrapped her arms round his waist.

She watched silently as he reached down to touch her face. Then, looking up into his eyes she saw his emotions dancing there; wonder that pleased her, the pain and fear she didn't understand, nor could she comprehend the sadness she saw, but mixed with all these was love for her and that was enough to make her forget the rest.

As Laguna leaned gently down kiss her, he felt her smile. He hoped fervently that she was too distracted to notice the single, treacherous tear he felt rolling down his cheek.

Standing back, he quickly wiped away the teardrop before Raine had the chance to notice it. Then, with one hand still buried in her hair, and without taking his eyes from hers, he reached out and turned out the lamp.

"We should probably get some rest too." Squall said abruptly, turning away from the screen.

"You really think they'll be resting?" Rinoa laughed.

Squall scowled at her and walked out.

"Squall! Don't be like that! And don't ignore me, either!" Rinoa yelled as she ran after him.

"I think we should leave, before furniture starts to fly out there." Quistis said seriously.

Ellone was already walking silently from the room, lost in thoughts and memories.

"I'm staying here. I don't know about furniture but clothes are definitely gonna be flying here." Irvine chuckled, nodding to the screen.

"Leave Sir Laguna in peace, Irvine." Selphie dragged him away.

"Out." Ordered Quistis imperiously.

"Yeah, I'm going, I'm goingâ€|Jeez, Quisty sure is bossy today, Sef."

"Don't call me that." Quistis said absently, as she always did. Irvine just laughed.

Laguna sat up in bed watching Raine's sleeping form. Poor Raine, he thought, knowing how she hated to sleep on her back. It was the only way she could sleep comfortably now. He gently brushed the hair back from her face so that he could watch the smile play on her lips as she dreamt.

On impulse, he lay a hand on her stomach. Even through the blankets he could feel the kicks of a baby.

"Hiya, Squall." He said wryly.

Glancing out of the window, Laguna looked up at the stars. It didn't matter how much things changed down here, the stars would always be there. The same as they always had been, he thought. Raine should have been a star, he decided in one of those whimsical thoughts that occur late at night. Raine would always be beautiful then, and perhaps she wouldn't die. But stars could and did die, and however much he hoped to change it, he knew that Raine would leave him. At least this time he could be with her. That was the whole reason he was here.

Turning back to watch her, he knew he would not sleep tonight. He would be content to sit and gaze at her face, absorbing every memory he could. In the dark, the starlight shone in his tears.

Selphie watched, finding it strange that as she observed these events, they were occurring many years ago.

"It's all so sad!" she wailed. "I wish I could do something to help!"

"Quiet, Sefie." Irvine cautioned, as he leaned against the doorframe. "You'll wake everyone and we're not supposed to be in here."

"Yeah, alright." She sniffed.

"Lets go." Irvine whispered, putting an arm round her shoulders and leading her quietly out of the room.

4. Default Chapter Title

> <meta name="ProgId"> Thoughts and Memories

Thoughts and Memories.

By Arian

They assembled in front of the screen the next morning.

"Wait a minute! How did we know Raine wouldn't die while we were

sleeping?" Rinoa exclaimed.

"Ummâ€œwe didn't." Selphie said.

"I told ya we should of stayed and watched."

"Irvine!" Quistis scowled at him, hoping Squall hadn't been paying attention. He had.

"What? He wanted to stay in here? Irvine, these are my parents, dammit! I'm not going to let you leer at them!" Squall told him, unusually emotional.

Rinoa winked at Ellone, who quickly surmised that the events of yesterday had touched Squall deeply and that Rinoa had been doing everything she could to encourage that. How would he take what must surely happen today? Ellone was nervous. She had never actually seen this day before. All that she had told Squall about Raine's death she had learnt from other people. She knew today would be painful but she felt it was important they should all see this.

Ellone suddenly realised that all conversation had ceased as Rinoa turned up the volume on the screen and the events of the past unfolded once more.

Raine sat in bed, trying bravely to find something edible in the breakfast Laguna had cooked. It would probably help if she could identify what it was. The only way to find out now would be to ask him but he had been so happy that he could cook her breakfast she did not want to upset him.

She coughed and pushed the plate aside. He should've made toast. Even he couldn't foul up toast, she thought wryly.

"You don't want any?" Laguna smiled.

Raine opened her mouth to answer, when suddenly her expression changed.

"Oh!" She exclaimed "Oh dear!"

"What is it?" Laguna asked, worried.

Composing herself, she spoke very slowly and calmly to her husband.

"I want you to go to the house with all the flowers, half way to the shop. Go in, and ask the old woman to come and see Raine, OK?"

"Why?"

"Don't ask questions, just go!"

Confused he started to walk to the stairs, then stopped. Realisation of what was happening dawned on him and he turned to stare at Raine before running out the door.

Raine laughed softly to herself until the next twinge made her grimace.

After a few minutes had passed, the old lady appeared, followed by Laguna.

"This is bad, Raine." The village midwife told her. "You've only just recovered from that fever and you're still very weak."

Raine nodded, then gasped at the pain she felt.

"Alright, lets see what we can do. You want him in here?" the woman asked, indicating Laguna.

"I need him. Don't send him away!" Raine pleaded. The midwife nodded and gestured for Laguna to sit down.

Pulling a chair to the bedside, he sat looking into Raine's face. Whatever was going to happen to the rest of her, he didn't want to see. Taking her hand, he leaned close and kissed her cheek.

"I love you." He told her and watched her smile but far too soon it faded from her face.

"I thinkâ€| I'm going to die." Her face was frightened, as if saying it might make it come true.

"Don't be silly! You're gonna be fine!" Laguna answered too quickly in a tone of forced cheerfulness.

Raine looked at the midwife who shook her head slowly.

"I think not. Butâ€|you knew, didn't you? That it would come to this. That's why you were so desperately happy this morning, wasn't it?" She pieced together all the peculiar things he had said and done since he had come back.

"Yes, I knew." Laguna was relieved to give up the deception. "I've known since I came back from Esthar. Please don't ask me how because I really can't tell you. Just trust me."

She nodded. "Alright. But promise me you'll stay with me. Don't leave me alone. I'm so scared, I don't want toâ€|" She stopped, unable to continue. "Stay with me. Stay until the very end."

"Of course." He promised clutching her hand.

"How did she know?" Squall demanded. "Sis, I don't understand!"

Ellone shook her head. "I really don't know. Perhaps she justâ€|_knew. _Or else something in Uncle Laguna's face gave it away."

"Damn! I didn't want her to know. Then, at least she could've been happy for a bit longer."

"Squall, your mother, from what I've seen, was not stupid. She could've figured it out from Laguna's behaviour. Even if she didn't, just how long do you think he would be able to keep up this cheerful act? If Rinoa was going to die, would you be able to keep smiling to the end, telling her everything would be fine, even if you knew it couldn't be?" Quistis asked, vehemently.

Squall shook his head, remembering his panic when he thought Rinoa would die in space.

"No, I couldn't do that."

Rinoa smiled and flung her arms round his waist. Usually uncomfortable with her displays of affection in front of the others, today Squall found her presence soothing.

"It feels strange." He said quietly. "I'm watching my own birth." Pausing, he decided to tell them what he had been thinking. They always nagged him to share his feelings, so now he would.

"It's not something I'm used to feeling, but I think this is all my fault."

They stared at him, puzzled by this sudden guilt.

"I killed her, didn't I? Raineâ€|my motherâ€|died because of me."

"No!" Ellone told him. "It's not your fault. If it's anyone's fault, it's mine! I'm the one who didn't listen to Raine. I thought I'd be fine outside the pub but the soldiers came and took me away. If I'd listened perhaps none of this would've happened!"

"Listen to yourselves! You're both as bad as each other! Ellone, it is no ones fault. Raine being ill had nothing to do with your kidnapping. Even if it did, and you had stayed inside the pub, do you think the soldiers wouldn't have found you? Raine wouldn't have let them take you away, though. She probably would have died then, trying to save you." Quistis turned to Squall to continue her tirade.

"Honestly, Squall! I never thought I'd hear you saying you felt guilty about anything, especially something that is not - and could not be - your fault. You didn't have a choice, did you? You couldn't choose not to be born. That choice lay with your parents and always has. That doesn't mean that you it's their fault, either. No one could be blamed for this."

Squall looked up, sheepishly.

"Perhaps it is stupid to place blame."

Rinoa nodded.

"Look!" Selphie cried, pointing to the screen. "Squall, it's you!"

Squall couldn't understand the sudden mirth around him. Even Sis thought it was incredibly amusing to see him as a baby.

The laughter died as one by one they realised what this meant. They all knew Raine had died in childbirth. Squall had been born, so was Raine still alive?

Laguna kept his gaze fixed firmly on Raine's face. He didn't want to know what the midwife was doing, the whole thing terrified him. The pain Raine felt showed plainly on her face and he hated it. Hated that there was nothing he could do to make this easier for her. He tried not to think about what had to happen and winced at Raine's grip on his hands.

"Laguna!" Raine's scream reverberated around Winhill.

"It's OK. I'm here." He leaned down to comfort her when suddenly he heard a cry. A baby's cry. He sat up in amazement, then quickly looked down at Raine. She was still alive?! Did that mean she would be alright now?

"My babyâ€|let me hold himâ€|" Her voice was weary and she looked so exhausted.

"Raine! You're alright! It's over and you're still here!"

"I'm tired." She smiled, squeezing his hand gently.

The old women had finished cleaning the baby and handed Raine her son while she got on with cleaning up.

"Our sonâ€|" Raine looked down at the bundle in her arms, her voice filled with such love.

"I'm leaving now," the woman told her after a few moments, "I can do no more."

Raine nodded and there seemed to be a meaning there that Laguna could not understand. Seating himself on the edge of the bed, he looked at the baby, still stunned.

"Squallâ€|" He whispered.

"What did you say?" Raine looked up at him. "Squall? That's perfect for him. Look at his eyes, Laguna. Greyâ€|just like a stormy sky."

Carefully, Laguna wrapped his arms round his wife and child.

"I'm tired." She sighed. "He'll be special, won't he? I can't believe how much I already love him. I thought it would take time but it took no time at all. Squallâ€|I like that name."

"Oh yes. He's special, alright." He laughed softly.

"I'm tiredâ€|Let me sleep, Laguna." Raine whispered, leaning her head on his shoulder.

"Rest then. I won't let anything hurt youâ€|either of you." But Raine had already closed her eyes and was sleeping gently. Looking down into Squall's grey eyes, Laguna smiled. Even as a baby he had a

frown.

"Special? He'll save us all, Raine." He breathed quietly, before closing his own eyes to sleep.

"Yeah! Raine's alive! Whoo-hoo!" Selphie yelled, dancing madly round the room with Irvine. Squall saw Irvine wink at him as he spun past. Did that guy never give up?

"You can change the past, Ellone. Laguna just has." Squall heard Rinoa say. Ellone's eyes were filled with tears.

"No." she whispered. "You don't understand. It's not over yet."

Squall didn't understand. "Sis? What do you mean?"

"Time travel can't change anything. If Raine lived you would never have gone to Garden, yet you're still here with us. Laguna would have no reason to go back to see her if she had lived but all of us are still standing here. I understand now. When I told you Raine called out for Laguna when you were bornâ€|she did. Exactly as people told me. They just never told me he was there with her, perhaps they thought I already knew that bit."

"This is beginning to make my head hurt." Rinoa sighed.

"I think I understand what you're saying, Sis." said Squall, pausing. "She said she loved me, even then. How could she possiblyâ€|?"

"She was your mother." Rinoa shrugged.

"I don't want to watch anymoreâ€|but I have to see." He looked helplessly at Rinoa. She nodded solemnly.

"If there is more, we should seeâ€|"

5. Default Chapter Title

> <meta name="ProgId"> Thoughts and Memories

Thoughts and Memories.

By Arian

Part 5 (Last bit I promise!)

Laguna opened his eyes. He hadn't really slept. However tired he was, it was so hard to sleep in daylight. Leaning down, he kissed the top of Raine's head. Something was wrong. She felt too cold and her breathing wasn't right. Starting to panic, he shook her gently.

"Raine, honey, wake up." Still Raine didn't stir. It seemed a miracle the baby was still asleep but young Squall appeared to be a heavy sleeper.

Slowly, Laguna recalled Raine's last words to him._ "I'm tiredâ€|let me sleep."_ It couldn't happen now, could it? He had been so sure he had changed everything and in spite of everything he was still very unprepared for this.

"Oh noâ€|Not now! Raine, I thought you were going to be OK! Don't leave me Raineâ€|" he pleaded, gently tilting her head back, so he could see her face.

Raine's eyelids fluttered open and she smiled weakly up at him. Seeing the weariness in her eyes, Laguna gave up hope.

"I'm so sorry. I thought I could save you or stop this from happening but I can't do a thing. I should've done things so differently." He said helplessly as tears streamed down his face.

Raine carefully laid Squall down on the bed next to her. "I love you, Laguna." She whispered, reaching up to his face. As he leaned down to kiss her, he felt her body heave a sigh, and the hand at his neck fell limp.

"Raine!" He cried out, holding her tightly to him, letting the tears of 17 years of guilt fall onto her hair. He couldn't change anything. Even if he had returned sooner from Esthar, there was nothing he could do to prevent this.

Sometime later, he heard someone enter and climb the stairs. Looking up, he saw the old woman had returned.

"You have to let her go now." She said calmly. "We have to bury her. I'll take the baby for you." Laguna had completely forgotten about Squall, still laying quietly on the blanket.

The woman paused, uneasy. It seemed it was up to her to ask the question but she still hated it. "What would you like to be written? On the gravestone?" She asked, as gently as she could.

Laguna stared up at her, words running through his head. Wife, mother friend, all she had been to everyone who knew her. It wasn't enough, he didn't have words for all that should be written there.

"Raine Loire." He said finally. "Just her name. Raine Loire. It's all that can be said."

The old woman nodded and, as she walked away with Squall towards the door, Laguna saw the green vapour beginning to appear.

"Put Squall in the Kramer's orphanage on Centra." He said slowly, knowing what had to be said. "Ellone will return here soon, send her with Squall."

Once she had left, Laguna carefully laid his wife's body on the bed.

"Goodbye, Raine." He said softly as the mist enveloped him once more. "Sleep well."

Rinoa looked around her. Odine stood operating his machine,

blissfully happy that his experiment had worked, paying no attention to the rest of them.

She sniffed and wiped the tears from her eyes. Selphie, Quistis and Ellone were crying, too. Even Irvine had turned his back and Rinoa was sure she had spotted Squall wiping his eyes.

She watched as the green mist billowed up and a figure appeared in the smoke. Sobbing Ellone ran to Laguna.

"Hey, Elle. What's the matter?" Laguna asked, his own eyes still red rimmed. Remembering he didn't know about his audience, Ellone froze and glanced guiltily at the screen. Laguna looked around at the tear stained faces and then at the screen.

"You're watching?" He slowly put it all together. "Elle?"

"We had to. I'm sorry, we needed to see her too."

Nodding, he tried to accept this new information on top of all else that had happened and gave up. "I'm going to rest. See you in the morning, Elle."

As he started to walk from the room, Squall intercepted him.

"Laguna, I don't know what to say to you. I'm not good at this, but I want you to know that I do understand some of it now. I've got to know my mother much better and perhaps my father, too." Squall stopped, unsure of what to say next.

"Thanks, Squall. I am sorry for leaving you, when you were small, but I really didn't know."

Squall nodded and let Laguna walk from the room.

Squall stepped uneasily into the president's office in Esthar. It had been two days since he had last spoken to Laguna and the rumours he had heard were not promising. It seemed Squall's idea to send Laguna back had made him more melancholy than he had been before.

Squall walked to the back of the office where Laguna stood looking out over Esthar.

"Laguna," Squall said quietly, "You can't do this. You have responsibilities."

"Shut myself away up here, you mean? I wouldn't do that. But seeing Raine again, after all this time I'm still so sure there was something I could've done. Perhaps in an earlier time? Odine or Elle could easily send me back again!"

Squall rolled his eyes. He thought they had already gotten this out of Laguna's system but it seemed not.

"Yes. They could send you back again." Squall sighed. "They could send you back constantly and you could spend your whole life reliving

the happier times in Winhill over and over. But it wouldn't be real. It's in the past and you can't really change anything. In the past, there is a Laguna who loves and cares for Raine and is with her when she dies. That has to be enough now."

Laguna nodded.

"You're right, I know. But it is so difficult."

"You're needed here. The people of Esthar need you as President. Why, is something I've never been able to figure out, though. Kiros and Ward need their friend back, Ellone needs her Uncle Laguna backâ€|and Iâ€|need my father back." Squall hesitated seeing the curious look on Laguna's face. "Not that I want to start playing happy families, or anything. It's too late for that. I just need to know you're here." He continued awkwardly.

When there was no reply, Squall walked towards the door.

"Squall." Laguna called as he opened the door. "Thanks."

Squall turned and saw Laguna smile before he headed back to Garden.

"How is he?" Ellone asked Kiros, as they hovered outside the office.

"For a while, I wasn't sure if he was better or worse, but he really is back to normal now. As normal as Laguna ever is."

Ellone smiled.

"It's up here somewhere." Squall told Rinoa as they climbed the hill.

"Squall, Laguna would have brought you up here if you'd asked."

"I know." He stopped and let her catch up. "But this is something I want to do on my own."

"I'm here."

"You don't count. You're special."

She smiled and they continued their walk. As they reached the marble plinth, she sensed his change of mood.

"What's the matter?"

"I had to come here. Just once. Just to see what it was like but now I'm here, I don't know what to do."

Rinoa held her hands apart and Squall watched as a brilliant white light left the ground and travelled to the space between her palms. Slowly, a shape began to form and the light faded, but did not leave entirely. She handed Squall a perfectly formed, large, white

rose.

"Start by giving her this, Squall. It won't ever fade or die. It will stay here for Raine always. It's my gift to her, too." The young sorceress told him, softly.

"My mother loved flowers." He said simply as he knelt and laid the rose in front of the plinth.

"Let him go, Ellone." Kiros told her, sometime later. "It doesn't do him any harm to visit her from time to time."

Ellone nodded and watched silently as Laguna walked to the stone on top the hill.

Reaching Raine's grave, Laguna saw a single, white flower left there, and he bent to pick it up. Seeing the glow that seemed to emanate from within its petals, he smiled and placed the rose back by the plinth. He knew where this had come from and he could guess who had created it and why it was here.

Sitting at the graveside, he sighed. The sense of guilt he had felt for so long had finally left him but nothing could fix the hole Raine had left in his heart.

"Well Raine, I suppose I should tell you what Squall has been doing with his life and who the young lady who made you the rose is." He started, and brushing the hair back from his eyes, he began to relate Squall's adventures.

Returning a few hours later, Ellone saw he had fallen asleep.

"Uncle Laguna." She shook him gently. "It's time to go back now."

Opening his eyes, he smiled at Ellone.

"OK, Elle." He climbed to his feet. "Let's go."

Ellone set off down the slope but hesitated when she saw Laguna had stopped.

"Sleep well, Raine." He whispered before turning back to Ellone. They both belonged in the present now, not the past.

The End

Author's note: Sorry to interrupt, but I just have to poke my nose in

again! I actually thought about writing an alternative ending to this. If

you're interested e-mail me, and if I get a good enough response then I

might write it... although it probably won't be what you're expecting...

Anyhow, more garbage from me for anyone who's interested, a poem this time, I rather like it, so see what you think. It seems sort of appropriate in places...

The Foreboding. By Robert Graves.

Looking by chance in at the open window
I saw my own self seated in his chair
With gaze abstracted, furrowed forehead, unkept hair.
I thought that I had suddenly come to die,
That to a cold corpse this was my farewell,
Until the pen moved slowly upon paper and tears fell.
He had written a name, yours, in printed letters:
One word on which to pour -
No protest, no desire, your naked name, nothing more.
Would it be tomorrow, would it be next year?
But the vision was not false, this much I knew;
And I turned angrily from the open window aghast at you.
Why never a warning, either by speech or look,
That the love you cruelly gave me could not last?
Already it was too late: the bait swallowed, the hook fast.

End
file.